

**Purpose and Need**  
**2021 Tonto Basin NW Range Projects**  
**Tonto Basin Ranger District**

**Date:** 4/09/2021

**ID Team Leader:** Eric Hoskins/Crystal Martinez

**Project Name:** 2021 Tonto Basin N.W. Range Projects

**Project type:** Structural Range Improvement

**Target start date:** April 10<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Target finish date:** October 31<sup>st</sup> 2021

Expected NEPA Documentation Type: Categorical Exclusion (DM required)

If Categorical Exclusion, select Category: 32.2 (9) Implement or modify minor management practices for range allotment when no allotment mgmt plan

**Project location:** This project consists of three separate projects all located on the Tonto Basin NW Allotment and on the East side of Tonto Creek in Tonto Basin Arizona. The legal location for each of the three separate improvements is as follows:

Quartz Ledge Water System: T7N, R11E, Sec 20 and 21

Hackberry Corral: T7N, R11E, Sec 30

Packard Fence: T6N, R10E, Sec. 2

**Vegetation type:** Sonoran Desert Scrub

**Existing Condition**

The Tonto Basin Allotment located on the Tonto Basin Ranger District is permitted for 342 Cows/calves and 262 yearlings with an Allotment Management Plan signed in 2016. The basic goal of the management plan is to improve resource conditions on the Tonto Basin N.W. Allotment while maintaining a viable livestock operation. As indicated in the AMP signed in 2016, additional water developments are key to making this a successful operation as well as changes to fences should be made to benefit riparian values.

The goal of the management plan further outlines that vegetation should be managed to achieve satisfactory or better watershed conditions by maintaining soils currently in satisfactory condition, or an upward trend in impaired/unsatisfactory condition. The three proposed projects are designed to solve three separate management issues currently impacting successful management of this allotment:

Water access: The current trough at Quartz Ledge is located up a narrow drainage. At the spring source site itself there is no surface water or indication that a spring existing. Water comes out of a buried spring box through a galvanized pipe to a nearby trough. The water then overflows the trough in wet times and flows down back to the drainage. Because of the trough being located in a narrow canyon cattle congregate up this canyon for some distance to access this water.

Corral: Proper management of livestock required handling facilities to brand, separate, work and haul or bring in livestock. Currently the only functional corral located on the East side of Tonto Creek is in the

Malone Holding pasture which is just above Tonto Creek. Livestock in the upper portions of the pasture have to be gathered and moved all the way down the mesas to do any branding or moving by truck. Temporary corrals have been authorized in years past so that cattle aren't moved through several other pastures when a corral is needed and they are in the upper elevations East of Tonto Creek.

Fence and gates: Tonto Creek Riparian Area is a critical section of riparian habitat that the Forest and Permittee work hard every year to keep cattle out of however from time to time people leave gates open which allows cows to get into this section of the creek. Additionally fences down next to the creek and in the floodplain of the river are not as effective than those located on mesa next to established roads that can be checked frequently.

## **Desired Conditions**

As described in the Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan on replacement page 42. Standards and guidelines state that a minimum of four waters per section and one water per section in big game key areas should be provided. In management area 6J livestock should be managed at Level D. Level D management for livestock includes:

*Management seeks to optimize production and utilization of forage allocated for livestock use consistent with maintaining the environment and providing the multiple use of the range. From all existing range and livestock management technology, practices may be selected and used to develop cost effective methods for achieving improved forage supplies and uniform livestock distribution and forage use... Cultural practices may be combined with fencing and water developments to implement complex grazing systems and management methods.*

The Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan states that rangeland in less than satisfactory condition will be treated with improved grazing management along with the installation of structural and non-structural improvements (pg 195). Also to develop structural improvements in association with AMP's to maintain utilization at levels appropriate with management intensity and AMP objectives. Specific to these proposed improvements the following desired conditions apply:

Water Access: Additional water sources are desired to distribute cattle where limited water supplies currently exist or where cattle are concentrated due to topography.

Corrals: Functional corrals and handling facilities are critical to proper livestock management in order to move livestock efficiently and doctor or care for livestock needs. These corrals should not be constructed for the sole benefit of the permittee's management but for the usefulness in the management of those livestock to meet resource goals and needs.

Fences: Fences are useless if gates are left open so either installing cattleguards or constructing the fence in locations that allow for the free movement of recreationists is desired or if gates are installed across F.S. roads, easily opened and shut gates are key especially when located next to key critical riparian areas. Additionally, fences should not be constructed in floodplains or close enough to perennial water that livestock are tempted to jump the fence to access flowing surface waters.

## **Current Management Direction**

The Tonto Basin Allotment has an active term grazing permit with an Allotment Management Plan signed in 2016. Part of that management plan authorizes adaptive management that "includes monitoring to

determine whether identified structural improvements are necessary or need to be modified. Structural range improvements will be constructed in accordance with 2015 EA and would require to meet Forest Service Standards. Additional input may be required from the interdisciplinary team to determine the best implementation and mitigation practices to follow when constructing new range improvements.

## **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this project is to change or add structural range improvements to meet the goals of the Allotment Management Plan. The need is to comply with direction found in the Tonto National Land and Resource Management Plan and to move the allotment towards our desired conditions.

## **Proposed Action**

This proposed project consists of three separate minor range infrastructure projects located on the Tonto Basin NW Allotment as follows:

Quartz Ledge Water System: Add one mile of pipe off of an existing trough down canyon to a new trough. This new trough location can be accessed by livestock from multiple directions rather than all the livestock trailing up the narrow draw to the existing trough.

Hackberry Corral: Construct a new corral just off of F.S. Road 604 at the pasture division between Lambing and Kayler to support livestock movement and handling in the upper reaches of this allotment.

Packard Mesa Fence: Construct a new section of fence next to F.S. road 3301. This will get the existing fence out of the Tonto Creek floodplain and place the gate in a more visible and easier to see location. The fence location will help reduce recreation, riparian and livestock conflicts and also help prevent road proliferation on the mesa.

## **Design Features**

Quartz Ledge Water System: The pipe will be no less than HDPE 200psi 1" and the trough must have a functional access and escape ramp for wildlife. The trough must have a functional float that keeps water at the spring area and not overflow.

Hackberry Corral: Construction of the corral must be within the surveyed boundary with a loading shut angled so as not to block F.S. road 604 when using. Corral is to be constructed of steel pipe and sucker rods.

Packard Fence: The fence will be constructed using a smooth bottom wire and three strands barbwire to make a 42" tall fence spaced from the ground up at 16" 6" 8" 12". H Braces will be at least every ¼ mile with T-posts not more than 20' spacing and only three stays between T-posts. Where the fence crosses F.S. Road 3301 an easy to open and shut gate will be installed.

## **Implementation Timeline:**

Initial Scoping should be completed by May 10<sup>th</sup> 2021 and implementation is expected to begin by June 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.

Please send your questions, concerns, or mitigations to:

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